

22

A SERMON

Preached at

The Parish-Church

O F

S. MAGNUS the Martyr,

In the

CITY of LONDON,

O N

Sunday, *December 24.* 1693.

By *Edward Roberts*, M. A. then Lecturer.

Imprimatur,

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Carolus Alston, R. P. D. Hen. Episc.
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By Elizabeth A. M. [illegible] 1907

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A
S E R M O N

Preached at the
Parish-Church of S. Magnus, London, &c.

S. JOHN, Ep. III. Vers. 2.

*Beloved, I wish above all things, that thou
mayst prosper, and be in health, even as thy
soul prospereth.*

THESE are the Words of the Favourite-Apostle of our Blessed Saviour, who had the Courage and Fidelity to own Him in Extremities, to endure the Scandal of the Cross, and behold His shameful Crucifixion. They are part of this short Epistle, which was directed by him to *Gaius*, as is manifest from the Inscription of it, Verse 1. About whom the Conjectures of Learned

Men are various, when they would point him out with more particular Exactness as to his Abode or Residence. But the undoubted Account of S. John in the Context, makes out what is material to our purpose, *viz.* That *Gaius* was not only a Profelyte to Christianity, so made by him, but a generous Assertor of it before an Infidel World; a worthy Man, who it seems was a Master of Wealth, and of a Heart also to employ it aright; who made his House the Sanctuary of distress'd Professors, shewing a very remarkable Kindness and Hospitality both to the brethren, and to strangers, who bare witness of his charity before the Church, Verse 5, 6. In consideration therefore of his extraordinary Usefulness, S. John sends him this *Epistolary Letter*, to be a standing Expression of his Concern for his Welfare, in the largest Extent of that Word; to assure him, that he now did, and always should, *wish above all things, that he might prosper, and be in health, even as his soul prospered.*

The Words are so very plain in themselves, that there is no need of a *Paraphrase* to make them plainer; they contain an affectionate and devout Petition of the Apostle, That God would prosper *Gaius* in his Body, his Fortune, and all his outward Concerns, as he had already to a high degree improved his *spiritual* and better part. And this is the properest, and indeed the only proper Return I can make this Day, as to Your worthy Pastor, so to You, and others the Friends of the Church,
and

and mine, who without any Law, but that of Kindness, have continued Your Civilities and Encouragements for many Years. This is the great End of our *Holy Calling*, your Furtherance in the Ways of Piety: our Prayers, our Publick Discourses, our private Admonitions, all our Endeavours within *these Gates*, and without, center here in *your Prosperity*. The *Spiritual Part* of it, is that we most earnestly contend for, without which, the largest *Temporal Portion*, we are sure, must vex and oppress the Owners. The *Welfare of the Soul* we may humbly ask, with a well grounded Confidence of being heard; for that is a Petition always agreeable to the Divine Will, but Prayers for *Bodily Satisfaction*s do often return empty, and should be presented to the Throne of Grace, with great Indifferency of Mind, and an entire submission to Providence. The Words of the Text will greatly direct and assist us in our pursuit of this *Comprehensive Happiness*, and shew us the way, to reap both the Blessings of God's Right Hand and Left.

In speaking of which, I will insist on the following Heads of Discourse.

First. Shew wherein the *Prosperity of the Soul* properly consists.

Secondly. Add to this an Account of that *Bodily and External Welfare*: the Desire of which is strongly rooted in human Nature, and too often made the great, the darling Consideration of our Lives.

Thirdly.

Thirdly. Comply with an essential and inseparable Duty of the *Ministerial Function*, by falling in with the Apostle, and *fervently Wishing*, that *You* and all others the Inhabitants of these Two Parishes now united in Law, (I wish with all my Heart I could say united in Religion, and met together in the same Congregation) may *prosper* in both respects.

I begin with that which lies first in the Order of Nature and Religion, tho placed last in the Order of the Text, namely,

To consider, *Wherein the Prosperity of our Souls does consist*. And here, as a necessary Introduction to all that follows, as the Groundwork and Foundation of the whole Discourse, I hope it may be taken for granted, in a Christian Congregation, that we all carry about us such *immortal Beings*, this may fairly be thought, the settled Persuasion of all, who frequent the *Assemblies of Publick Worship*, that they repair *hither*, under the particular influence of it, with a full entire Design to receive the End of their Common Faith, *even the Salvation of their Souls*. If indeed we look abroad into the World, and view the Temper of the Age, with a careless Eye, there are to be found too many, who decry the *Doctrine of Spirits*, that Branch of it in particular, which relates to the *Immortality* of the Soul. But this Design, most unworthy of the Reasonable Nature, is carried on by such as are in their Practises degenerated into Brutes; who stifle as much as they can, all
Intellectual

Intellectual Operations, and maintain a strict Converse with things purely *Corporeal*. And when the Subject of their Morning thoughts, and coolest Recollections, is no other than the *Fulfilling of their Lusts*, it becomes their Interest to hope, that the *Higher Principle* shall never awake to a future Account, but utterly perish with the Body. Whereas to the Pious and Unprejudiced, the contrary is most apparent; When the Mind lies fairly open to its own Notices and Deductions, we are taught by it, that there is in us a *Principle distinct from the Body*; this is the common Dictate and Result of *Reason*; but the *Duration* of it, must be fetch'd from *Divine Revelation*; This shews its *Immortality*, with the greatest Evidence and Authority; God, who made our Souls, expressly telling us, that they are *Essences which can never be destroyed*, by those who have power and malice sufficient to *kill the Body*; and that upon the Dissolution of it, they shall pass into a State, in which *Death shall have no more Dominion over them*. Wherefore, acting consistently with our selves, and maintaining a due Regard to the Principles of common Christianity, we ought to secure to our Souls the Preeminence; *These Nobler Beings*, should be always the peculiar Objects of our Care, whose *Prosperity* must be carried on, and perfected, by Ways agreeable to their *Spiritual Nature*. I will mention Three.

I. *By our judicious and deliberate Professing of the Truth,*

Truth, by the assured Light of which, our Souls may have a full view of, and be conducted to, the Regions of Bliss. This was the leading Method by which the mighty Growth of *Gaius* was happily cultivated, even by his *Walking in the Truth*, and resolute Adherence to it, stiled here by way of Eminency, *The Truth*, and called before, *The Doctrine of Christ*, deliver'd from his own Mouth, with admirable Perspicuity to the Apostle; and by him, with agreeable Integrity, to his Christian Convert; it being a *Truth* far more excellent, than any which could be learn'd from the Writings of either *Jew* or *Gentile*, that which is according to *Godliness in hope of eternal Life*; Which frees our Minds from the Thralldom of Sin and Ignorance, it being the inseparable Property of this *Truth*, to inform and cleanse, to exalt and purifie at once. Now this being not the Prerogative of any Man's Nature, nor imprinted on the Soul from the Beginning, but an After-acquirement, and the sole Privilege of the Christian, our Care to be acquainted with it, should be Early; And let us set out in quest of *Truth* as soon as we can, it will appear, that *Error* has taken the Advantage of the Morning, and is set out before us; there being but few in every Age, who can date their Regeneration from the *Font*, and glory that their Minds were always under the happy Power and Conduct of *Truth*. Some are led into it, by the meer Prepossession of the *Country*, and others light upon it, by *chance*, as they are wandering

dring in the Vale of Darkneſs, and perhaps little deſign to be enlighten'd. *Saul* went out to ſeek his Father's Aſſes, and meeting the Prophet, received an *Unction* from above, which made him quite another Man; And the *Woman of Samaria*, who went for a Pitcher of Water to *Jacob's Well*, found the Saviour of the World ſitting there, who made her a moral Inſtrument, to bring many of the *Samaritans* to the Faith. Some have gone forth of their Doors with a peremptory Reſolution to affront the Prieſt, and yet have been caught fiſt, and afterwards converted by his Doctrines; The Sermon has been ſo pat and ſeaſonable, as to pierce the darkeſt Corners of their Souls, curing the Diſtemper of the Heart, cauſing it to flow with ſincere and obſtinate Tears, when juſt before it was filled with nothing but profane Laughter and Deriſion. But then theſe are *Extraordinary Events*, and ſo not to be depended on; Special Caſes that can never with any Juſtice be drawn into Conſequence. For if we regard the common Methods of Providence, the Ordinary Proceedings of Salvation, Truth is not to be found but in a *Regular Way*, and within the *cloſeſt Communion of the Church*, it being very obvious to any who peruſes the Goſpel, with a ſincere and unprejudiced Mind, that the great Deſign of the Bleſſed Author, is never answer'd, but by a conſtant regard thereto; Who came into the World to erect a *Spiritual Kingdom*, to form Mankind into *One Body* under Himſelf,

and to save them as such; not as *Stragling Believers*, but as Persons incorporated into His Church, feeding and nourishing their Souls, within this Sacred Inclosure. And this most Concerning Truth seems to be well understood by You, who profess your selves Members of the *Established Communion*. For questionless if any Church upon Earth, be effectual to secure and advance the *Prosperity of Mens Souls*, this upon a deliberate Tryal, will be found best fitted for that High and Noble End; a Church which with inviolable Integrity preserves the Holy Scripture, and from that Fountain draws forth a Religion, which is most Pure, and every way proper to ennoble our Natures, and perfect the Common Salvation. A Religion which is not excepted against by its greatest Enemies, for believing *too much*, or adopting any thing that is *false*, but as believing *too little*: Our Charge is not the rejecting of any *Old Article*, but a declar'd most commendable Averse-ness to subscribe any that are *New*; It being the peculiar Glory of our *First Reformers*, those Glorious Instruments in the Hands of God, that they threw off, and cashier'd only *Additional Corruptions*, restoring the Doctrine of our Saviour to its *Primitive Simplicity*, as it stood in the World, before the Birth of those Errors, which are now comprehended under the Name of *Popery*; Who most readily received all the Untainted, all the truly Catholick and Orthodox Truths that were left in the *Roman*, into the *Articles*, *Confessions*, and

Homilies

Homilies of the National Church: in which it will be a matter of spiritual Interest to continue always, but a particular Crown, a Glory to do so, in Times of Liberty and Temptation. For Men to embrace Truth for *its own sake*, is an Argument of Sincerity; to continue *Regular Good Christians*, when there is no external Restraint to make them so much as *Good Hypocrites*, is *Conformity* upon Choice and Religious Principles, and is to be justified from the Abstracted Recommending Excellency of the *Church* it self, which has no By-Ends to serve, no Design to drive on, but our Redemption from all Captivity, the Increasing of our Graces, and the Saving of our Souls, and in the end, *They shall Prosper that love it*.

II. The *Prosperity of the Better Part*, consists as in a judicious and settled Profession of the Truth, so likewise in the *Observance of its Known Rules, and Standing Institutions*. The Truth may be, and too often is, manifestly held in *Unrighteousness*; Persons may be in the External Communion of the Purest Church, and receive no more Honour or Benefit by it, than *Pontius Pilate* does by standing in our Creed; they may be plac'd there to their eternal Shame and Condemnation. Our Happiness cannot arise from our Relation to it, but must flow from an *Habitual Conformity* with its Laws and Publick Appointments. It will be but a slender Support to our Consciences before the Tribunal of God, that we have not given his Glory to another, nor his Praise

to *Graven Images*, if our Lives are spent without Veneration for his Laws, and Gratitude for his Benefits. Our Zeal against *Idols* can never be an Attonement for the Contempt of his *Worship*. We may be so far Orthodox, as to own the *Sacraments* of Christ, and those only; and yet stand Condemned for their Disuse, or Profanation. The Holy Scripture it self is left in our Hands to no purpose, if we only vindicate our Right to read it, and cry out against the sacrilegious Detention of it from the People in others, and yet slight it our selves, or seldom peruse it, to the great Ends of Religion, *to build us up in our most holy Faith*, to fortifie our Minds against Thriving Errors, and Spiritual Enchantments. And in these Religious Performances, it will be impossible to come on well, and *Prosper* without great Application of Mind; The Fervours of Piety, so remarkable in the first Disciples, had this, next to the Grace of God, for their Spring and Origine; those Heights were owing to their unwearied Constancy, to their *continuing stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship, in Breaking of Bread, and in Prayers*. And mighty are the Effects of it at this Day in the *Eastern Christians*; who preserve a Sense of the Religion of their Saviour within the Dominions of its great Enemy, chiefly by this Means, by rising early before the Sun to perform their *Publick Devotions*, as previously necessary to their entering with success on the Labours of their *Private Callings*. Nor is the Efficacy of it contemptible among
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our selves; For we may with Comfort observe in this great City, that many Persons of Slow Capacities, and in Strait Circumstances, by a careful Watching over their Hearts and Ways, by an entire Dedication of themselves to God, by the signal Advantage of having the *Honest and Good Heart*, together with an habitual Attendance on their *Parochial Ministry*, to arrive to a good Proficiency in Practical Religion, and by painful Degrees to be nurs'd up into Excellent Christians. Whereas others of far Quicker Parts, and more Leisure, wanting Probity of Mind, Closeness of Attention, and a Teachable Humility, ramble eternally from one Church to another, but without receiving lasting Benefit in any. Men of desultory Tempers grow Sceptical, they may vouchsafe to try all things, but are habitually pleased with nothing; Who industriously decry, what *Solomon* recommends as the only sure Method of Thriving in the Concerns of Eternity, *Eccles. 11. 6.* *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.* But the highest Zeal and Constancy in the *Holy Offices*, can be no sufficient Security to venture our Souls upon; these are only Means of Christianity, and not to be rested in. Considering therefore that the most flaming Sacrifice may carry in it destructive and consuming Qualities, and that some in all Ages of the Church have set up Devotion to the ruin of *Honest Morality*;

Praying

Praying long, the better to drown the dismal Cries of Widows and Orphans, and to build their own Fortunes upon the Graves of their oppress'd Neighbours, I must crave leave to carry the Matter higher yet, and lay before you,

The Third, The finishing Stroke of this *Spiritual Improvement*, and that is, *Universal Righteousness*, which is never to be Concealed where it is, and but rarely Counterfeited where it is not: It being not a single Virtue, but all united in the same Breast, a strong Combination of the more Generous Qualities of the Mind, which dilate themselves on all proper Occasions into Life and Practice. And this was the concluding Argument of *S. John*, by which he demonstrated the Growth of this excellent Christian; Namely, His Crediting of the Truth by agreeable Practises, whose Charity was a real Fruit grafted upon a right Stock, even Faith in the Blood of Jesus. Now that Religion is most Genuine, and Conformable to the Mind of its Blessed Author, which is expensive, and draws something from us, which we highly value, and would not part with, but for Conscience-sake. Instrumental Duties being cheap and easie, may be performed by meer Impostors, and Hypocritical Pretenders, but *Good Works* are not so easily Counterfeited, for Men seldom act a Part in Religion to their *Great Cost*; In this Case the Danger of being imposed upon is far less, or none at all; Devotional Acts may have base Ends and sinful Mixtures, they must be
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Tried and Weighed in the Balance, and oft-times they are Light, and found wanting; the Whore in the *Proverbs* had *payed her Vows*. Whereas a Good Life, a bright Charitable Conversation, is like the purer sort of Money, which passes freely from Hand to Hand, and is never questioned in any Payment. When the Actions of a Christian testify for him in the Gates, and his Worth is attested before the Church, Malice it self is struck dead; Nay, the Publick-spirited truly Good Man stands intitled to the Blessing of *Demetrius* in this Epistle, and has no Enemy, or rather should have none, but Satan the common Enemy of Mankind. Our being Members of the Church, and our using the Means of Grace, are fair Arguments of Probability, these are likely Signs that we shall, but Real Acts of Piety and diffusive Beneficence, are certain Evidences of our having by God's help already *prospered*. And yet he that advances thus far on the way to Heaven, and makes a full Stand here, shall never (unless by an extraordinary Mercy) arrive thither; for Christianity proposeth no fixed determinate Degree of Virtue beyond which there is no advancing. The Spiritual Stature is at no Period, like the Natural at a full Growth, but always growing. Our brightest Graces are still capable of Accessions, and must shine more and more to the perfect Day. For Men to get into a Road of Religion (and yet alas how many are more unhappily engaged, and upon the broad way to Destruction!)

Deſtruction!) and to be content with living after the old cuſtomary Rate, is plainly to deceive themſelves. They may in ſuch a Caſe be no Blemiſhes to their Profeſſion; but by the ſtrict Rules of it, they ought to *preſs forward*, and commence Encouraging Examples, Viſible Patterns of Righteouſneſs, which is a Station both of Safety and Honour. And as the Voyage is never reckon'd prosperous, till the Dangers of the Seas are paſt, the Storms rid out, and the Veſſel brought ſafe into Harbour; So neither ought we to conclude our ſelves free from Temptations, and foul Relapſes, till we come to the *New Jeruſalem*; Our Felicity grows on this ſide, but is there only in maturity and perfection. This is the full Scripture-Notion of *Spiritual Proſperity*, which was the firſt Point to be ſettled according to the propoſed Method.

The *Second General Head*, and now falling under Conſideration, is, An Account of that *Bodily*, and *External Welfare*, which is ſtrongly rooted in our Common Nature, and too often ſought with raving Importunity. The *Body* being of a mean Original is incapable of the forementioned Diſcipline and Cultivation; never to be raiſed in this World to an higher Character, than an Heap of Duſt and Aſhes; and yet overlooking its mean and corruptible Qualities, many beſtow on it the *Greater Care*. This is an Object of a very diſtinguiſhing Paſſion, and no Means are forbore, no Coſt ſpared, to prop up and adorn it; which is the
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degenerate Folly, the reigning Sin of Mankind. However, God having formed the *Body*, and made it the Mansion of the Soul, which always acts by the Mediation of it, we have it plainly granted in the Text, that the Welfare of it is a Real Philosophick Good, and the Object of a Christian *Wish*, which consists mainly in three things.

I. In the *Health* of it. *Grotius* in his Comment observes, that *S. John* wishing Corporal Prosperity to *Gaius*, set down *Health*, as the most necessary and excellent Part of it, without which his other Satisfactions had been of little Worth. This preserves the Organs, enables us to judge of Tasts, and Sounds, and all other sensible Objects; it gives due Quickness, and Agility, and makes us capable of living with any Pleasure to our selves, or Profit to our several Generations. The want of Health caused the most patient Man to desire *Strangling* rather than Life. A Blessing of that vast Use and Consequence, that God reserves it in His own Power, and makes it the Reward of Religion, which in Scripture is expressly said to be *Health to the Navel, and Marrow to the Bones*. It may be greatly preserved where it is, and restored where it is lost, by Human Remedies, but without His Blessing the Art of Man is vain, a meer Empiric Prescription. The great Importance of it, its giving a true Relish to all outward things, makes it the common Form of Salutation in all Countries; We still greet our Friends with particular Enquiries about the State of their *Health*, and bid them Adieu under the Influence of an Hearty Concern for it. But this is

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our Unhappiness, that this Fundamental Blessing does not make us always grateful to Him that gives it; the Value of it is seldom sufficiently acknowledged, till we are deprived of it, and smitten with Sickness. For this Reason some Persons have magnified the Divine Goodness, for giving them weak and crazy Bodies, which might keep their Souls always waking, and upon the Wing; An healthful vigorous Constitution, which was designed by God, as an Instrument of his Service, and the Owners eternal Good, being too often put to quite contrary Uses, to make them Slaves of the accursed Spirit, and Servants of Corruption.

II. *Wealth* succeeds as an Object of the sensitive Appetite, by which ought never to be understood barely what is necessary to keep us from starving, but a *convenient Portion* of outward things, such as is suited with the Obligations of the *Posts* we fill, our *Characters*, and *Relations* in the World. That may be *convenient Food* to one Man, which, if given to another, would but make him the more hungry, raise, and not satisfy the Appetite. That may be too scanty and strait an Allowance for a Person advanced to an high Station, which, if conferr'd on a Man of less Figure, would oppress, and run him into Distraction. The Doctrines of some relating to the Point in Hand are most Absurd and Superstitious, who would tie down all but themselves, to *meer Necessaries*, and talk of the World with that Air of Contempt, as if an Earthly Body could subsist by Intuition, and the slender Accommodations of a Cell were sufficient in the midst of the

the City ; But such Speculations are plainly confuted by the Words of that Apostle who Preached the Religion of the Cross ; and we are otherwise instructed by the God of Nature, viz. not wholly to extinguish the Desire of Earthly Conveniency, but to correct the Keeness of it, and keep it Regular. Who having made the Pleasant Garden in *Eden* the Station of *Adam* at first, is so far kind to his Posterity, as to make their Bodily Life easie and delightful. No Labour is assign'd them that is purely Penal, their greatest Toils are mingled with Sweetness, and by proper Encouragements turned into Play and Diversion. Wealth is made the Subject of His Promise to the Virtuous, and is most certainly a Blessing, when honestly acquired, and managed with Wisdom, so as to cause many Thanksgivings unto the Donor. It is true indeed, the Acquisition of it can never be directed by any certain Rule, because it depends upon lucky Seasons, and unforeseen Accidents, and often flows from hidden Springs ; But a known visible Instrument of procuring it to any Land, is Commerce with Foreign Nations. When in the Reign of *Solomon*, Silver and Gold were plenteous as the Stones in the Streets of *Jerusalem* ; much of that vast Treasure was the Growth of other Countries, it was brought from *Ophir* by the Navy of Ships, which the King had formed in *Ezion-Geber*, and by the Merchants that had the knowledge of the Seas. This is the great Support of Human Society ; Merchandizing unites the most distant Nations ; we are in some measure fed and cloathed ; by those whom we never saw, nor can see. This promotes Industry, and make

a suitable Compensation for the various Perils, and Difficulties of Mankind. But tho all Men are strangely dazled and captivated with the Brightness of *Secular Wealth* and *Grandeur*; yet there are but few whom God thinks fit to entrust with it; nor is it always an Argument of His Favour to be so entrusted. Riches may, and frequently do, flow in upon Righteous and Excellent Men in great Abundance; Those who have been most eminent for *Piety* in their several Ages, have been so for their *Wealth* too. But the Want of it, is no absolute sign of wrathful Dereliction, and that we are shut out of the Care of God's Providence, Who can, and if there be need, *will prepare a Table for his Servants in the Wilderness*, and by infinite Ways beyond the Ken of Reason, and to them surprising, reward their Dependence on Himself; Who can turn Penury into Fulness, and Bondage into a State of Liberty. To expect always the Completion of our Wishes, and to sail with a full Gale, is plainly to mistake our Right to outward things. Freedom from Evils is the Happiness of Glorified Saints above. Earthly Pilgrims can only depend on Succours proportioned to the Weight of their Sufferings, and to be so supported in this World, as not to miss of the durable Glories of the next.

The *Third* main Attribute of *External Welfare*, is *Peace*; a Blessing necessary to Guard, and secure us in the Enjoyment of the Two before-mentioned; under which Term, the *Jews* were wont to comprehend all *Prosperity* whatsoever. And as the Fullness of time drew on, the latter

latter Prophets foretold the undisturbed Possession of Peace, as the peculiar Blessing of the Reign of the *Messiah*, as an Honour reserved by God to accompany the Manifestation of his Son, *Esay 2. 4.* *And he shall judge among the Nations, and shall rebuke many People: they shall beat their Swords into Plow shares, and their Spears into Pruning-hooks: Nation shall not lift up Sword against Nation, neither shall they learn War any more.* Which Prophecy receiving no Literal Accomplishment in the Condition of Christian States, which are but the more unhappily expert in the Art of War, and draw their own Blood without the Assistance of the Heathen, is expounded to be *prædictio consilii, non eventus*. With respect to Christ Himself, it is read with the Brightness of an after-Relation; for as He made his Entrance into the World in a quiet Hour, so was the promoting of Peace the whole Endeavour of His Life, and the thing it self bequeathed as a common Legacy to His Disciples at his Death. A Blessing of that High and Publick Nature, that the *Heathens* looked upon War to be the most terrible and afflicting of all Temporal Evils, and to us Christians surely, who by the Favour of Revelation stand in a clearer Light, it can have no milder Appearance. War, when extorted from a Nation in its Common Defence, is a sore Judgment to be lamented, and not gloried in as a brave, and lofty Undertaking. Victory it self can scarce hold up its Head for Shame, when represented as the Purchase of Christian Blood. The Evils of it are too much felt to need a Description, and God alone knows when the *melodious Voice of*
Peace

Peace shall be heard in our Borders ; of such as may not foster, and invite New Injuries, or present us with a Second, and more perfect Edition of the Old. The firm Possession of the Truth will in strictness compensate the Loss of it. Eternal Slavery to Idolatry and Superstition , is the greatest Misery which can befall any Nation, which is not already enslaved ; so that to ward off that fatal Blow, Wise and Good Men will calmly undergo lesser Hardships and Calamities, slight Essays of Misery, when compared with the Depredations, Ravages, and Military Executions of those Countries which are the Seat of War. And God who orders nothing in vain, much less for destructive Ends, does certainly ordain the Suspension of *Peace* it self for our Good. There are frequent Interruptions of it in all Kingdoms for wise Purposes ; the Peace of the Land of *Israel* was often shaken and destroyed, when the Government of that Nation was Theocratical, the longest Period of it which the Scripture mentions, is that set down *Judges 3. 30. The Land had rest Fourscore Years.* And without such Intermixtures of Publick Good and Evil , *Peace* would scarce be thought a Blessing ; did not the Night succeed, the Light of the Sun would annoy us , and Constant Day would be an insupportable Burthen ; and were it not for Sickneses and Poverty, Health and Abundance would have no Relish in them.

This then is a wise Method in the Hands of God, to make us sensible of His Favours, and from caressing the World and the Body , the meaner gratifications
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of Sense, to exalt us to a more Christian Employment, to render us more careful in the improving of our Souls, which cannot, except in Negatives, be defined by us, and must last for ever. As long indeed as we are compounded of these different Principles, the *Animal* and the *Intellectual*, it will be an allowed necessary Duty, to endeavour the *Welfare of both*: But then abundant care is to be used by us, that our Attendance be proportioned to the Dignity of the Object; that we keep the worse part under the constant subjection of the better; for it looks like a rank Infidelity to spend Six days in the week in providing for the Needs, nay, too often for the Sins of the One, and to grudge God's own Day as too much to promote the Salvation of the other. Both indeed are comprehended in the *Prayer* of the Apostle, but still in a distinct Order, the one in a perfect Subordination to the other: For supposing *Gaius* to have already prospered in *Virtue*, He thereupon prays for an agreeable external *Prosperity*: And in the very same Order, and animated by the like Hopes of You, I proceed

In the Third and last place, To comply with an Essential Duty of the *Ministerial Function*, which is positively express'd in these Words, *I wish above all things, &c.*

It is here most humbly acknowledg'd, that God is the Author of all Success and *Prosperity*; which is never to be obtained whilst he is neglected and left out of our counsels and consideration. The expression of the *Prayer* is noble and high, and shews it to have been the Language of the Heart; and doubtless the Supplication it self

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was the more prevalent with God, because presented by a supreme Officer of his Son. Nor was this a strain of Devotion peculiar to *S. John*, but a common pitch, equal'd by all the Apostles, nay, visibly excell'd by *S. Paul*, *Rom. 9. 3.* *When he wished himself accursed from Christ, for his Brethren his kinsmen according to the flesh:* A strange expression of Love! An overflowing Charity! To be content himself to turn out of the Sheepfold, and stand utterly excommunicated, if by that means the *Jews* might come in and be saved. And in the Church of *Corinth* no unkindness that was offered to his Person, no disparagement that was cast upon his Doctrine, could abate his Zeal for their Salvation; and when constrained to execute the severest Censures upon the incestuous *Corinthian*, he urgeth the charity of the *End* to justify the severity of that *Action*, by alledging, *That the flesh was destroyed, or punished; that the Spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord.*

These then are our Patterns, and shew us how to demean our selves in the Church of the Living God: We are sent out as so many Labourers into His Harvest; and whatever be the Reward, we shall not fail of Work enough. Our Labours are thick and more abundant, even such as may bow down the greatest strength, and caused him who was divinely Inspired, to complain of *Insufficiency* in the discharge; and none of our manifold Labours can succeed well and prosper in our hands, without the especial Grace of him that sent us: For there is no ground so well prepared, as to bring forth nothing but good Wheat; Tares will more or less grow up with it;

it; and unless the Soil be kindly seasoned, our Endeavours are lost. The best Counsels must perish in the delivery without attentive Dispositions in the Hearers; who are therefore to be *weighed* rather than *numbred* by the prudent Messenger of God: And when instead of growing better, they are but the more refractory and contumacious Sinners under Instructions, we have no power to cut down and to destroy; to use any force, were to betray and abuse our Authority. We do preach a Law which is enforced pon mankind with the highest Penalties, even under pain of having their Souls and Bodies eternally Tormented; but those invisible Terrors are slighted, and the most real Torment declared Metaphorical. Scandalous Offenders may indeed be debarr'd Communion, and denied the Publick Comforts of Religion, but that to them is no Punishment. Nor are we appointed only to contend with the Infidelity of Mankind, but with their Ignorant Mistakes and Prejudices, things more to be pitied, but often equally difficult to be removed. The *Profane* are without Apology, because they outface God Himself, and despise His Threatnings: And the *Careless* are never to be excused, who expect Virtue should grow up in their Souls without their own Concurrence, and be nourished there without Moral Reflections; which is a *Method of thriving* as improper and preposterous in Religion, as in *Civil Business*, and yet gainful Opportunities, and good Markets must be narrowly watched to drive on the One, when no means are held necessary

to the obtaining of the Other. And among those who subscribe to the Use of Means, and frequent the Sanctuary, there is much Barrenness to be found also; the main End of Publick Instruction is often defeated by the partiality of the Affections, which are byass'd and brib'd beforehand; so that all is rejected, or swallowed in a Lump, without the solemnity of Chewing and Examination; and not the *Doctrine* that is recommended, but the *Person*, or his Character is chiefly regarded; and the Holy Gospel is received as the *Word of Men*, and not as it is really, and in it self, the *Word of God*; who takes it for so High an Affront to be shut out of his own House, and denied so much as a partial Influence in His own immediate Service, that he often withholds the *Increase*, as no slight expression of his Anger, to let men see the necessity of looking beyond *Earthen Vessels*, and confess that the *Excellency of Power* is of Himself.

So that for the removal of these and other Impediments of Spiritual Growth, Recourse must be had to the single Remedy in the Text; We are to beseech God to speak to the Hearts of Men, and to put an effectual check to the daring Impieties of the World, to awaken the *Many* who sacrifice to their own Lusts, and to Encourage the *Few* who are Devoted to his Fear, *Lifting up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees*. And He might have interposed His Power sooner, but that He seems resolved to keep us in a depending Posture, and to be owned as our *sure Refuge* in Extremities: And in this the
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Obligations of our Church are most exprefs and particulars which regard the Circumstances of the Absent, that He may be moved, *To bring into the way of Truth all such who have erred and are deceived*; and tho they may scatter dreadful Anathema's against us, our dayly Prayer for them, is, That they may see their Errors, and be saved. Remembering always, that there is but *One Heaven*, and no possibility of coming thither, but by Him, *who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*

This is a Divine Charity to be extended to the most Pious Votaries, who can never be raised above it; but on the other side Men may sin themselves out of a Capacity of receiving any Advantage by it; This is the Opinion of our Apostle, *1 Ep. ch. 5. 16. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that that he should pray for it.* This is a Wickedness of a strange Taint, like the Sin of *Saul* which is interdicted the Sanctuary, beaten off from the Horns of the Altar, and not to be mentioned in our Prayers; But whatever be the Nature of that Sin, we are sure it cannot dwell in those who maintain a visible Care of their own Salvation. For you the *Duty* may be performed not only without offence, but with Gracious Acceptance; And this Holy Office may be executed at a Distance, when we are no longer to converse with our Friends by publick Instructions, and ought never to be omitted by my self. For as the World goes, and is like to go, we must reckon it a piece of Civility to have our *Legal Rights* cheerfully paid, that slender Maintenance of

God's House, which escaped the Sacrilege of former Ages, and hitherto the Envy and Malignity of the present: And consequently, where the Recompence of our Sacred Employment is precarious, the Obligation is heightened, when our Pains are thought worthy of any Requital. And some have express'd that unmerited Kindness, and undissembled Friendship, which for me not to own, would be somewhat worse than common Ingratitude. The Pulpit was erected to shut out all Flattery and empty Complements, but still to continue the Chair of serious Truth, and a grateful Behaviour is no where more becoming: But I forbear, and shall use the words of the Roman Orator, *longiorem orationem res postulat, natura vestra brevior*: The subject requires a longer, but your Nature a shorter Acknowledgment. Others must be told of nothing, but their Vertues, but you more humbly disclaim all Merit, and chuse rather to be told of your Sins, and faithfully admonished in the waies of Life.

So that my best way to pay acceptable Thanks to this Congregation is, to *Magnify my Office*, and to Employ these last, and softer Minutes of Speaking, in calling upon you, to mind the great Affairs of your Souls, which is a certain means of enlarging your Fortunes. For when all is done, Religion is the most faithful Servant to our Worldly Interest, which is respected by it, though not as the chief Motive, yet as a collateral Reward; It is of the Pious Man that David speaks when he tells us, *that whatsoever he doth shall Prosper*, *Psalm*. 1. 3. And the observation holds

holds with equal truth, nay, with greater strength, with respect to Publick Bodies, who cannot have a reasonable assurance of finding success in their undertakings, but by recovering the Ancient Reputation of Truth and Virtue, which are deprest, wellnigh stifled and lost in a thick Crowd of Errors and Immoralities. God is expressly said in Scripture *to have pleasure in the Prosperity of his Servants*, His Providence is still awake over them *for Good*; But this is a Favour with no modesty to be expected, whilst men persist in a wilful opposition to his Laws, set loose from all obligations of Honour or Conscience, so indifferent what Religion they take up, or whether any at all, *He shall deliver the Island of the innocent*: and it is delivered by the pureness of hands *Job. 22. 30.* And in this Case the Theatrical shews of Purity are not quite contemptible, because the very *Form of Godliness* is not to be confronted, and baffled by any thing besides the *real Power* of it. The *Mockeries of Superstition* are less provoking than *open Infidelity*, and a *Religion upon Beads* is not so bad as a downright insolent *Contempt of Holy things*. This is the highest and most desperate Pitch of wickedness, to which when great Numbers in any Nation have advanced with Impunity, it must necessarily bring on its Fatal Period. For this height of Sin is impregnated with misery, nay actually travels with publick Desolation, and God alone can strangle it in the Womb, *It being time for him to Work*, as the Psalmist expresseth it, *when men have made void his Law*.

In Consideration therefore of your own *Private Good*
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and of the *common Interest* of your Country, *Stand in the old Paths*, inflexible to insnaring Doctrines and wicked Examples, and let me intreat you once again to be Masters of so much Christian Thrift, Method, and good Order, that the Exchange and Shop may not intrench upon the House of God; That your temporal and Eternal Interests may be carried on without defrauding each other, without undue competition, with Religious smoothness and success. Your decreasing in Wealth under Emergent circumstances is but a *Misfortune*, but your not improving in Virtue will be ever a *Fault*, that being placed within the reach of human Industry assisted by the Grace of God. And suffer me to say, that there is no Dream so idle, no Practice so ridiculous, as that of seeking Happiness in a Vale of Tears, and placing it in the *Multitude of the things we possess*. For the greatest Banks of Wealth may be swallowed up in a Moment, this glittering Idol, like the River which brings it up to your very Doors, Ebbs and Flows continually, and is never at a certain point, with the most Righteous Owner; A thousand chances may, but Time must destroy it. Whereas the welfare of our Souls is not to be impaired by the Iniquity of Times, or any external accident. Virtue gathers strength, increases by being shaken, and is the more Prosperous under Trials. The want of *Corporal* supplies indeed may run us upon lesser Evils and Inconveniences, upon those of Faring the harder, or Dying so much the sooner: But to want the *Spiritual*, to have the Soul covered with darkness, sick of Passions, and polluted

lured with Sin, is to stand exposed to an Eternity of real Miseries. But our Case is better, and there is no invincible necessity of our being miserable in either Respect. Either Happiness singly considered is humbly confessed too *valuable* for the best men to expect as their right, but both put together are not too *Great* for God to bestow, who having created our *Souls* and *Bodies* with different *Faculties* and *Desires*, directs a suitable provision for the *Natural* and *Spiritual Life*, and is ever pleased with our earnest Labour, and Devout contention for the Prosperity of both. Of which God of his Infinite Mercy make us all partakers through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

